

Cyclorama Building
369 Franklin Street
Buffalo
Erie County
New York

HABS No. NY-6297

HABS
NY,
15-BUF,
24-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS
NY,
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CYCLORAMA BUILDING

HABS NO. NY-6297

LOCATION:

Corner Edward Street, between Main and
Franklin Streets, Buffalo, Erie County, NY
USGS 78 degrees 52' 24.6" \pm
longitude, 42 degrees 53' 12.77" \pm
latitude

PRESENT OWNER:

Frank L. Ciminelli
Ciminelli Development Co.
350 Centerpointe
Amherst, New York 14221

PRESENT OCCUPANT:

None

SIGNIFICANCE:

Cyclorama is a 16-sided regular polygon
originally constructed to house
"cycloramas," or panoramic art displays
popular in the United States in the late
1800's. The building is one of the few
surviving cycloramas.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: Constructed between July and September 1888, the building was first opened to the public on September 8, 1888. The opening was marked by the unveiling of the first cyclorama art display shown in the building. (Buffalo Commercial Advertiser, September 9, 1888.)
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

Chain of Title of Cyclorama Building

OWNER

Catharine W. Myer

Jacob F. Schoellkopf	Deed dated 7/13/1882
The German's Young Men's Association of the City of Buffalo	Deed dated 3/26/1883
Queen City Cyclorama Co.	Deed dated 9/17/1889
George W. Schmidt	Deed dated 7/11/1891
Charles Graben	Deed dated 12/1/1891
The Buffalo Amphitheatre Company	Deed dated 2/29/1892
Freeman M. Vilas	Deed dated 4/1/1892
The Gurney Company	Deed dated 5/17/1892
Edward C. Randall and James K. Bancroft	Deed dated 4/20/1893
The Duquesne Investment Company of Buffalo, New York	Deed dated 4/3/1894
The City of Buffalo	Deed dated 12/24/1907
Edward H. Butler, John H. Lascelles and Wm. Gaertner, as the Trustees of the Grosvenor Library	Deed dated 1/10/1913

The City of Buffalo	Deed dated 7/1/1954
The County of Erie	Deed dated 7/1/1954 and Deed dated 4/14/1964
Wm. H. Parks	Deed dated 9/18/1973
Canadian News, Inc.	Deed recorded 3/1/1974
Dana F. Moreton	Deed recorded 2/16/1978
Canadian News, Inc.	Deed recorded 10/22/1978
Stanley J. Collesano and Dennis R. Insalaco	Deed recorded 12/22/1978 and Deed recorded 12/24/1979
Edward & Franklin Cyclorama of Buffalo, Inc.	Deed recorded 7/2/1980
Frank L. Ciminelli	Deed dated January 10, 1986 Deed recorded January 10, 1986

4. Builder: Queen City Cyclorama Co. (Buffalo
Courier 8/20/1888)

Contractor: Unknown.

Suppliers: Unknown.

5. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been found. Early photographs of the building show the structure originally included a cupola atop a sloped, conical roof. Skylights were cut into the roof. These photos indicate a noticeable absence of windows on the south side of the building (as seen from Main Street). However, there was one large window and several smaller in a single row above it on the north side of the building (as seen from Franklin Street). The absence of large numbers of windows would reflect the building's original usage as the facility for the display of a 50 foot high and 400 foot long painting arranged in a circular fashion inside the interior perimeter of the structure. The size of the paintings displayed suggest the building's walls were originally well in excess of 50 feet high.

These photos also show what is believed to have been the building's main entrance facing Edward Street. This entrance featured a square portico protruding from the main structure with a false, decorative balcony atop it. Under the portico was a roofed doorway.

The only other significant features in evidence from these photos are the pilasters around the building. (Photos contained in "Buffalo Illustrated," 1890, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library.)

6. Between 1937 and 1942, Cyclorama was given a major renovation by the U.S. Works Progress Administration. This project gutting the building's interior and the introduction of a small auditorium and art deco details to the interior. The project resulted in the transformation of the building into a library reading room. (Courier Express 1/3/38; Buffalo Evening News 1/3/38).

Alterations to the building may also have occurred earlier to the WPA project. Newspaper photos taken while the WPA was razing the interior show the existence of numerous windows along the outside walls. This would suggest a renovation earlier to that conducted by the WPA. Also, it is not known when the building's original cupola was removed or the height of its exterior walls lowered. It is not certain when a single-story annex adjoining the main structure was built.

B. Historical context:

The building was specifically constructed to house cycloramas, large panoramic paintings which represented a popular entertainment form in the latter half of the 1880's.

Two paintings were displayed in Buffalo's Cyclorama, the "View of Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion" and the "Battle of Gettysburg." Both were exhibited for two year periods.

According to newspaper accounts of the time, several thousand people paid admission when the Cyclorama building was opened to the public in September 1888 with the painting of Jerusalem. These accounts indicate the painting was completed in sections by a German artist, Karl Frosch, who spent several years in the Holy Land conducting research on his theme.

The painting of Jerusalem may well be the cyclorama that has been exhibited for nearly a century in the shrine of Ste. Anne De Beaupre in Quebec. The cyclorama of the "Battle of Gettysburg" is now on display at the Gettysburg Battlefield National Historic Site.

Another cyclorama painting, "The Battle of Atlanta," was recently restored by the City of Atlanta and is now a tourist attraction there. That exhibit was originally housed in a round, temporary building in the 1890's and later moved to a museum building erected in 1921.

The cyclorama paintings were usually completed in sections by crews of painters.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Cyclorama is constructed of solid, red brick exterior walls that are 17 inches thick and rest atop a mortar and rubble foundation. A brick parapet surrounds the upper wall. This type of construction is now dissimilar to other structures built in the latter part of the 19th Century. The most prominent feature of the interior is a central column and capitol. These suggest the art deco detailing incorporated into the building's interior by the WPA. A lower, single-story annex adjoins the main structure and was apparently constructed as a mechanical room, perhaps by the WPA.
2. Foundation: The main floor in both buildings is a concrete slab on grade with foundations composed of mortared stone rubble, except for the east end addition to the building which is poured concrete.
3. Walls: Exterior bearing walls are composed of solid brick, nominally 17 inches thick, with recessed sections containing windows, and enlarged brick pilaster sections at each point of the polygon.
4. Structural system, framing: Exterior walls are load-bearing walls; there are no interior load-bearing walls. Timber trusses, varying from seven to nine feet in depth, span about 63 feet from the center column to exterior masonry piers and support rafter and beam construction. The chords and diagonal members in the truss are rectangular wood timbers, while vertical tension members are steel rods. The wood deck roof is placed atop 3X12 wood rafters at spacings varying from 16 to 24 inches.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: A pair of simple, parallel stoops adjoin the main entranceway on Franklin Street.
6. Chimneys: None.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entranceway faces Edwards Street; a loading bay at dock height is situated on the Franklin Street side. The main entrance way is unremarkable.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Elongated wood casement windows of various sizes, containing divided light sashes, circle the building.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Irregular polygon with a multi-ply, built-up system of felt and tar with stone aggregate finish.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: None.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: (Insert sketch plans)
2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: Floor is five inches thick poured concrete. Finish covering from WPA renovation is non-existent.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Interior walls are metal lath and plaster finish with art deco detailing on upper portion of wall. Partitions are wood stud with lath and plaster finish. Remains of ceiling indicate tile ceiling.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main entranceway unremarkable in color, finish or trim. Interior doors similar in character.
 - b. Windows: No interior windows.
6. Decorative features and trim: Central column includes capital with art deco finishes. Similar art deco details remain on upper portions of interior walls in some areas.
7. Hardware: Unremarkable.

8. Mechanical equipment: None.
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Mechanical plant, now non-existent, was previously located in annex to main building.
 - b. Lighting: Neon strip lights were installed during WPA renovation. The remains of these fixtures are in evidence on false truss coverings on ceiling.
 - c. Plumbing: No functional plumbing.
9. Original furnishings: None.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Structure is located on northern edge of Downtown Buffalo business district. Immediate environment includes retail shops, restaurants, theaters, and commercial and business establishments. Immediately across Edwards Street is St. Louis Catholic Church, one of the city's oldest churches. Site is located near above-ground terminus of Light Rail Rapid Transit system on Main Street and is immediately west of Kensington Expressway entranceway to downtown area.
2. Historic landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- A. Architectural drawings: None found.
- B. Historic views: Buffalo Courier-Express,
Ciminilli Construction, Buffalo, New York
- C. Interviews: N/A
- D. Bibliography:
 - 1. "Buffalo Cyclorama Co.", news article, Buffalo Daily Courier, May 5, 1887.
 - 2. "Cyclorama Groundbreaking", news article, Buffalo Commercial Advertiser, July 16, 1888.
 - 3. "Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion", news article, Buffalo Commercial Advertiser, August 20, 1888.
 - 4. "Description of Making Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion", news article, Buffalo commercial Advertiser, August 27, 1888.
 - 5. "Open to the Public", Buffalo commercial Advertiser, news article, September 8, 1888.
- E. Likely sources not yet investigated: None known.
- F. Supplemental material: (Insert photostats of newspaper clippings and library history).

IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

Prepared by: Ron Klug
Affiliation: Ciminelli Development
Date: 5/88